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INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000602

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EUR/CE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [PHUM](#) [LO](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT GASPAROVIC RETURNS TEXTBOOK LAW TO
PARLIAMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) During a December 18 meeting with President Gasparovic, Ambassador raised Slovak-Hungarian relations and Slovak engagement in Afghanistan. Ambassador urged President Gasparovic to sign the compromise "textbook" law, which calls for the inclusion of both Hungarian and Slovak place names in Hungarian-language textbooks. Gasparovic responded immediately that he had vetoed the bill. Although Parliament could pass the law when it reconvenes in January, Gasparovic suggested that PM Fico and Smer might not be as supportive in a second vote. Regarding Afghanistan, Gasparovic expressed support for U.S.-Slovak cooperation in an Operational Mentoring and Liason Team (OMLT) and for the potential deployment of Slovak Mi-17 helos and crews to Afghanistan.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

¶2. (SBU) Not unexpectedly, President Gasparovic decided to veto the compromise law on textbooks which would have restored the status quo, i.e., Hungarian place names would be followed in school books by the Slovak word in parentheses. This compromise approach had been put forward by Parliamentary Speaker Paska at PM Fico's request. (Note: the Hungarian Coalition Party had proposed Hungarian names only, while SNS and HZDS wanted only Slovak geographical designations.) Gasparovic resisted PM Fico's personal appeal to sign the bill because he deems it to be "unconstitutional" since it conflicts with the existing geodesy (map) law. President Gasparovic didn't address what is likely to be the main reason for his decision: signature would have jeopardized the Slovak National Party's support for his 2009 presidential candidacy.

¶3. (SBU) It is also apparent that Gasparovic's December 6 meeting with Hungarian President Solyom -- while positive in some respects, e.g, the two have agreed to continue making joint appearances at universities -- may have hardened his views. Gasparovic reacted negatively to what he considered Hungarian attempts to interfere in Slovak internal affairs. Regardless of rank or Ministry, our GOS interlocutors resent Hungarian "instructions" as to how Slovakia should treat its minority populations. We anticipate that Parliament will eventually approve the law, but that SNS and HZDS MPs will file a complaint questioning its constitutionality, so the issue is not likely to be resolved soon. Comment: Although Gasparovic's decision is not surprising, it is unfortunate. The compromise bill helped to quiet an issue that has caused tensions within Slovakia and between Slovakia and Hungary. End comment.

Afghanistan: Open to Additional Contributions

¶4. (C) Ambassador also briefed President Gasparovic on the

recent successful visit to Bratislava of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Roger Zakheim, and, in particular, his proposal that Slovak forces cooperate with an Indiana National Guard unit in an OMLT. The cooperation would include training, personnel and material support from the U.S., but Slovakia would get credit for leading the OMLT. Ambassador also relayed Zakheim's request that Slovakia respond positively to SACEUR's call for additional lift capacity in Afghanistan. Gasparovic reacted positively to the suggestion that Slovak pilots would deploy with Mi-17 helos to support ISAF operations. (Comment: Following a similarly positive response from the Slovak MOD, DATT is working in DoD channels to flesh out a potential way forward that could combine the two proposals.)

OBSITNIK